

C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

13 June 1957

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE*

SUBJECT: The Situation in Cuba

1. The Cuban situation was recently treated in NIE 80-57, "Political Stability in Central America and the Caribbean through 1958," 23 April 1957. During the preceding 18 months the regime of Fulgencio Batista, had been considerably weakened by growing unrest, largely political but, to some extent military. The conclusion reached in the estimate was, "Inasmuch as we do not believe that the Cuban government can fully restore public order or check the emergence of new civilian opposition elements, there is only an even chance that the Batista regime will survive the period of this estimate. A military-dominated junta would be the most probable successor."

* This memorandum has been discussed with DD/P, OCI, ACSI, and OIR. A particular effort was made to ascertain the views of the intelligence community on the likely succession to Batista.

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2. Batista's position has been further weakened during the brief period since publication of NIE 80-57. His government has been confronted with signs of increasing civil resistance, continued terrorist activity, extensive sabotage of Havana's electric power system on 28 May, renewed fighting with Fidel Castro's rebel forces, and an additional small-scale landing of rebels, possibly sponsored by ex-President Prio. Rivalry between the pro-government labor confederation and disaffected leaders of the electric, telephone, and bank workers has introduced a new element of unrest. In addition to guerrilla activity and labor unrest, there is the usual opposition from political parties who are seeking a peaceful return to normal democratic processes by negotiation with the government parties. These negotiations -- concerning agreement on next year's elections -- have broken down.

3. On the other hand, Batista's civilian opponents appear to lack army support while Batista thus far apparently has that support. His opponents have not stimulated any great response from the public except in the important province of Oriente where a majority of the inhabitants are probably sympathetic to Castro's movement. The opposition seemingly is not yet sufficiently well organized or united to eliminate Batista except possibly by assassination, and agitation remains primarily a terrorist and guerrilla operation. While the Communists (numbering about 10-15,000) are making a clever and determined propaganda drive, there is no evidence that their efforts are meeting with much success. Batista continues to be favored by economic prosperity in the country.

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4. Serious unrest will probably continue, and Batista is likely to meet it with increasingly authoritarian measures; he may again resort to a suspension of constitutional guarantees. Although he will probably try to limit the use of such tactics, he is apparently determined to eliminate guerrilla activity by almost any means. He probably hopes that the government's current all-out campaign against the guerrillas will lead to a settlement of the over-all problem.

5. As long as Batista continues to command the loyalty of the army, he will probably be able to remain in power. The army is likely to support the president only so long as the majority of officers believe continued support of Batista will not place their own positions in jeopardy. So far there is no evidence that they are turning against him. But there are some reports of disaffection among the ranks, plotting among the officers, some antagonism between junior and top echelon officers, and lower morale in recent months. Army leaders, as well as high government officials, are showing concern over the possibility that new revolutionary attempts are imminent. Thus Batista's future position vis-a-vis the army is uncertain at best; in the event of prolonged or intensified revolutionary unrest, the army might turn against him.

6. There is still only an even chance that Batista will retain power through 1958. In the absence of any clear alternative leadership with wide

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population and army support, a military dominated junta remains the most likely successor to Batista. We do not believe that such a junta would adopt an attitude toward US interests very different than that of the current regime.

7. Batista's fall would be followed by considerable maneuvering for power in military and civilian circles, and probably by a period of renewed instability. A junta would be under strong civilian pressure to effect a transfer of power to an elected government. However, it probably would be willing to transfer only after assuring protection of military interests. In the interim the junta might assign the caretaker function to a provisional president.

8. It is too early to estimate which military and civilian figures would comprise top leadership in the post-Batista period. It seems unlikely that Castro or ex-President Prio would achieve dominant positions, but Castro as well as pro-US Colonel Barquin* might play important roles. While Castro's supporters in this revolutionary period have been somewhat bitter toward the US for its lack of support, there are no essentially anti-US groups in Cuba except the Communists.

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* Imprisoned leader of the abortive military conspiracy of April 1956.